

## **Town Meeting Coordinating Committee**

Meeting of Tuesday, October 11, 2010

Police Station Community Room

**Attendance:** Peggy Roberts, Adrienne Terrizzi, Mary Streeter, Rob Crowner, Harry Brooks, Nonny Burack. Guests: Harrison Gregg, Anurag Sharma.

**1. Call to order:** Peggy calls the meeting to order at 4:06pm.

**2. Electronic voting discussion:** Harrison states that he has been asked to participate in a panel on electronic voting at the Massachusetts Moderators Association, along with moderators from Wayland, which has an open Town Meeting, and Framingham, which has a representative Town Meeting.

Adrienne summarizes the work of the TMCC subcommittee on electronic voting as investigating three main points arising from the survey conducted in the Spring: compiling costs for the current method of voting and an estimate of the cost of electronic voting, comparing and analyzing these costs, and measuring and analyzing actual time spent on voting in recent sessions of Town Meeting. Mary states that Kris Pacunas will do the leg work to find the right system at the best price if it is determined that an electronic voting system will be purchased. He has estimated the price at less than \$25,000 and the lifespan at approximately five years. Staff time should be about the same, though with a different distribution of personnel. Mary states that preliminary research indicates that tally votes take slightly longer to perform than standing votes. She hopes to eventually attempt to measure how long other elements of Town Meeting take.

During discussion of the issues and questions that the subcommittee has developed, the following items are asserted and/or conceded by members of the group:

- Most people would prefer to substitute electronic voting for both (and only) standing and tally voting, if it is used at all, though some would argue for using it in all votes.
- Electronic voting would eventually take about as much time as voice voting, although initially it would take longer.
- Freedom of Information Act considerations might require the saving of all results attained by means of electronic voting, which could result in more data than people are interested in.
- While other towns require seven members to doubt a moderator's call and force a counted vote, by long tradition in Amherst only one member needs to doubt.
- Clickers should be left after each session of Town Meeting to prevent losing or forgetting them.
- There can be only one method of voting at a time, with no accommodation for a member who refuses, chooses not, or is unable to use electronic voting, to use a tally card instead.
- Since Town Meeting votes are not secret, provision can be made for someone to assist a disabled member to vote using whatever method is being employed.
- It should be possible to vote to use a different method of voting for a single Town Meeting without having to permanently change the bylaws.
- No tangible benefit in staff expense has been identified, though there may be intangible benefits for town staff if electronic voting is used.
- A bylaw amendment providing for electronic voting should allow for either the Moderator or the Town Clerk to determine that electronic voting cannot be used for a particular vote (for instance in the case of technology failure) and that a backup method must be used instead.

The following additional questions are raised:

- How can clickers be kept track of so that someone does not leave a session while still holding one or leaving it with someone else to use in their stead?
- Could just one set of tally cards be used during the entire Town Meeting in order to save money and resources? This could be implemented right away whether or not electronic voting is ultimately adopted.

Sharma states that a theoretical twenty percent savings in time spent on counted votes does not add up to very many minutes and may not balance the costs and risks associated with electronic voting, which needs to work 100% of the time in order to be said to work at all. In this case, adopting technology is not necessarily a progressive step.

Nonny states that members of a representative Town Meeting are not in a position to serve their own interests, and thus the use of electronic voting to keep track of voting records and impose accountability betrays an improper understanding of Town Meeting. Electronic voting may be more appropriate for an open Town Meeting.

Harrison states that the drift of the discussion suggests that significant doubts about electronic voting are accumulating

**3. Adjournment:** The meeting is adjourned at 5:30pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Rob Crowner

Documents provided: n/a.